How We Can Make Reparation By Leading A Simple Christian Life

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Although all Christians should make Reparation, they should not all do it in the same way.

The mother of a family might make Reparation, but certainly not in the same manner as a Carmelite.

There are three factors which play their part in deciding to what extent each Christian, individually, can volunteer to walk the Royal Road of making Reparation. These three factors are:

1. The duties of our state of life
2. The leadings of grace.
3. The sanction of authority.

Bearing these in mind, we must likewise remember that there are two degrees of self-oblation to a life of Reparation. Taking for granted the acceptance of suffering from the motive of love as the essential principle of Reparation, Christians will be divided in proportion to the measure in which they devote their lives to the Cross.

How We Can Make Reparation By Leading a Simple Christian Life

PEOPLE are too prompt to think that, in order to consecrate themselves to a life of Reparation, they must necessarily live in a cloister, practicing silence and the most severe austerities of Christian penance. This is a mistake.

Reparation is not so much the observance of certain fixed *practices* as a *spirit* which adapts itself readily to any mode of life, provided it be truly Christian.

"The *spirit* of Reparation." Hence, before all, it is necessary to bring home to ourselves and to weigh the fact that our Lord was crucified -- crucified for us -- and that we must help Him; to discover those around us -- and how many there are! -- who are being lost. This seems a small matter, but how many Christians know nothing about it! If we lived guided by these two great thoughts, we would possess the spirit of Reparation.

As Chanoine Leroux of Brittany writes: "The life of Reparation is not in itself a particular form of Christian life…" yet it is not the common life found among all Christians. Why not? Because, on the one hand, we should try to realize what the Christian ideal really means, and this is rarely done. On the other hand, "all those who are drawn to seek holiness do not all look at it from this particular point of view" (*La Vie Réparatrice*, Desclée, 1909).

But no sooner do we possess this spirit of Reparation than we see all that it demands of us. We realize that, above all, we must be true to our baptismal vows, and keep the commandments of God and of the Church, not with a fidelity such as the generality of Christians offer God, but with an observance more integral and precise, without bargaining with God or seeking pretexts for escaping from our obligations. To serve God thus loyally in our private, social, and domestic life already opens out wide vistas.

How perfect would be our Christian life, if we were to ask ourselves before each action: Were Jesus in my place and in these circumstances, how would he have acted? It is easy to see what a sudden change this would effect in the conduct of individuals, in relations between nations, in the life of families and society.

A writer dealing with the question of the fall in the birth-rate [in France] -- a vital matter these days, and one which convicts many Catholics of having failed in their duty -- gives this title to his book: *France Re-Peopled by Practical Catholics*. The title suggests a scheme while passing a sentence of condemnation.

In no sphere can Reparation be made except by the assistance of true Christians. These must not fail to accomplish their task; they must be Christians to the backbone, fearless and "shameless," as Louis Veuillot explains.

Generous souls will always find numerous occasions of practicing their faith to the point of sacrifice. Cardinal Manning wrote: "We live in easy times. Who fasts nowadays? Undoubtedly the Church is very indulgent. Nevertheless, at the present time the Jews keep strict fasts annually, taking no food from sunrise to sunset, a sharp reproof to us who are disciples of Jesus crucified."

What terrible sufferings some of our soldiers had to endure during the recent War! For example, the Marine Fusiliers, who, during the famous campaign of Dixmude, had to stand in water for 26 days, with no other food than some tins of jam. Doubtless the cause for which they suffered was worth the pain, but is the cause of Christ less noble, though for this we dole out our sacrifices? Look around! See

what men endure for the world, for fashion. And we ourselves, what are we doing for souls, for Jesus Christ?

The crucifixes that please us must be artistic, not too harrowing, made of ivory, mounted on velvet. But remember, these are not the true ones. The real crucifix is rough, and it hurts.

When Heraclius recovered the Cross from the Persians of Chosroes, who had kept possession of it for 14 years, desirous of carrying it to the summit of Calvary himself, he put on his most beautiful robes, his diamonds, and his imperial crown. But the Bishop of Jerusalem objected, saying: "No. This cannot be. Do you not see the contrast between your luxurious robes and the bare cross?" Then the Emperor exchanged his gold and pearls for a hair shirt. The Cross of our Savior is the one that crucifies.

Hence, what a contradiction it is for Christians professing to follow Jesus Christ, to take such pains to avoid the most ordinary penances imposed by the Church! Cardinal Manning asks them with a touch of humor: "Allow me to ask you whether you believe your neighbor when he tells you that he cannot fast, nor keep the prescribed abstinence, that it affects his health, etc.?" And he adds: "I have no scruple in arousing the conscience of some of you, for I am convinced that we are living in an effeminate age, which tends to do away with the gentle severity of the laws of the Church."

Whence it is manifest that we need not seek further. Simply by keeping these commandments strictly, or always in spirit, we have numerous opportunities of offering God very meritorious sufferings and privations, as acts of Reparation.

Secondly, not only must we accept the mortifications imposed by the Church, but likewise those imposed by circumstances, such as reverses of fortune, bad health, bereavements, misfortunes, trials of all kinds. They abound; life is full of them, and is represented by a lyre with seven strings, of which one symbolizes joy and six suffering.

Bossuet compares our moments of real happiness to brass-headed nails that stud a door. They appear numerous afar off. Draw them out and you have scarcely a handful. Like the stepping-stones of a ford, our joys are unstable and far apart.

"Who art thou?" Beatrice asks one who is watching Dante's boat as it glides by. "My name? Do you not see that I am a weeper?"

"A weeper." Does this not define every man in this world, at least at certain moments? Hence, how sad it is to see how few are able to benefit by the tears they shed! Every one of us, with the total of

sufferings which his life involves, has means of acquiring immense merits. Most men make no use of them; they do not trouble about the matter. Instead of utilizing their crosses for Heaven and souls, they waste them, reaping no benefit from them, and only find in them occasions of sin, because of their rebellious feelings.

What should we say of a man possessed of a fortune all in gold if, instead of putting in into the Bank as an offering towards the restoration of national historic monuments, he were to stand on a bridge and throw the coins, one by one, into the river?

Is not our first impulse, when suffering overtakes us, to complain against God? Our Lord once said to St. Gertrude: "I wish that my friends would not think me so cruel. They ought to do me the honor of thinking that it is for their good, their greatest good, that I sometimes force them to serve me by doing hard tasks, and at their expense. I wish that, instead of being exasperated by these trials, they would see in them the instruments of my paternal bounty."

The élite of Christians grasp this truth. We give a few examples.

A young religious was attacked by a terrible illness, which carried him off very suddenly. The parents knelt by his corpse. Then followed this dialogue: "We will say the *Te Deum*; do you agree?" "Oh, yes, with all my heart."

Ampère had just married, and his future appeared bright. Suddenly, his wife was seized with a serious illness. In the depths of his sorrow he had the courage to write this passage: "O my God, I thank You. I feel you will that I should live for you, that my life should be wholly consecrated to you. Will you take from me all my happiness here below? Even so, Lord, you are the Master; I have deserved this chastisement. Perhaps you will yet yield to the pleading of your mercy." What a power there is in strong, deep faith!

A mother heard that her son had been terribly mutilated by a shell. He was a man of great courage, and she wrote this letter about him to a friend: "He suffers a veritable passion in union with our dear Lord. It is wonderful to see this young fellow, crucified, stretched out on his cross of agony, and yet so happy, while suffering a martyrdom every moment. I thank God for linking him with the redeeming sufferings of the Cross. In our grief, we do not understand the mysteries of mercy which these trials conceal, but I believe that in Heaven we shall know the price of these cruel immolations, and that our dear invalids are very powerful in God's sight."

This young man intended to become a priest, so his mother adds: "What matters *how* we give, so long as our Lord takes what He wills,

and gets the glory he desires from his poor creature?… If my son cannot be a priest, he can be a victim and share the rôle of Christ. Who would complain at being treated like the son of God?"

Shortly after this man's legs had been amputated, one of his brothers was killed. Still the brave mother shows nothing but brave resignation; she writes: "Only one more victim after so many others. God gave him to us, that we might lead him to Heaven. He has reached his goal. It seems so simple, but for us whose faith is so weak, how hard it is!"

How many mothers, sisters, and wives, bereaved by the War, have resolved henceforth to live as mourners. It might have been otherwise had they been courageous enough to transform the sacrifice imposed by God into a sacrifice willingly accepted, if they had said to their Heavenly Father: "Lord, I thank you for thus permitting me to share your Cross. Father, you asked for *my boy's* blood, you asked for *my* tears; I give you all. I should never have had the courage to ask you to take my beloved one, but since you have taken him, I will be brave enough to say that you have done well… I understand and ratify your act. If I cannot say *Alleluia*, at least I will whisper *Amen*. So, it is well."

Another mother, speaking of her son, who had fallen on the battle-field with many others in a glorious and costly campaign, wrote in confidence to a friend: "You know that I gave him up to God at the commencement, and now I not only *accept* the sacrifice, but *will* to offer it to God. I place it in his hands." The writer underlined the two words, "accept" and "will."

"My poor heart cannot reconcile itself to its solitude, and it desires ardently to give itself more fully, to offer itself wholly to God." Thus wrote one of the many brave women widowed by the War. O blessed yearning! May our Lord give it to many souls. She goes on to say that her love, "too human perhaps, will now become more supernatural." This is just what God wants, probably it was why he permitted the trial. Finally she prays "for great courage in offering herself more and more to God."

The excellent nuns who have charge of the Sanatorium of Villepinte have founded for their patients a "Guild of Thanksgiving." One of these young people hesitated about joining, saying: "I fear I shall not be able to say 'Thank you' to God when I suffer."

The practice of offering ourselves to God, as a victim of love and Reparation, is an admirable means of overcoming this fear. It would be an excellent practice for so many suffering souls, who are

paralyzed by the shock of recent events.

St. Jane de Chantal used to say: "The great wealth of the soul is to suffer much lovingly." Real Christians know the truth of this.

Père Ramière writes: "The soul can unite itself to God by prayer, and likewise by work, but that which most intimately unites the soul to God is suffering accepted for God, offered to God, and loved for God. Such suffering is the best of all prayers, the most fruitful of all toil." Père de Poulevoy says much the same: "Undoubtedly the greatest consolation of this life and the greatest resource of our soul is to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ. Yet there is something better, and that is to conform our will to God's Will; to be nailed to the Cross with our Lord, or to our Lord by his cross."

Pascal's admirable prayer *for the time of sickness* is well known. It expresses, better than any prayer we have seen, the desire to utilize to the fullest the trials of bad health, which are so painful and serve so well as acts of Reparation. We give a quotation from it:

"Do not permit me, dear Lord, to contemplate your soul, sorrowful unto death, and your body, the prey of death for my sins, without rejoicing in my sufferings of soul and body. For nothing is baser and yet more common with Christians, including myself, than to live lives of pleasure, while you are sweating Blood for the expiation of our sins. Take from me, dear Lord, all the sadness that is the fruit of inordinate self-love, and give me a sadness like unto yours. May my sufferings appease your anger. I ask of you neither life nor death, health nor sickness, but I beseech you to dispose my health, sickness, life and death, for your glory, for my salvation, for the good of the Church and of your saints."

Elizabeth Leseur, living in the world, chose as one of her mottoes: "Adoration, *Reparation*, Consolation," and wrote in the same strain as Pascal as follows:

"My God, I am and desire to be ever yours, in suffering or trial, in aridity or joy, in health or sickness, in life or death. I will one thing only, that your will be done in me, and by me. I pursue and want to pursue one aim only, to procure your glory, by the realization of your good pleasure in me. I offer myself to you to be sacrificed wholly, exteriorly and interiorly. I beseech you to dispose of me for your service, and to aid the souls so dear to you: to treat me, in so doing, as the commonest and most lifeless of instruments."

All spiritual writers hold that the most profitable crosses are those which God imposes. St. Francis de Sales writes in his characteristic style: "The best crosses are the heaviest, and the heaviest are those

which arouse our greatest repugnance, those which we do not choose, the crosses we find in the streets, and better still those we find at home. These are to be preferred to hair-shirts, disciplines, fasts, and all other practices of austerity. There is always something of over-nicety in the crosses we choose; because there is something of self in them, they are less crucifying. Humble yourself, therefore, and accept those which are imposed upon you against your will."

But does that mean that all voluntary practices of penance are reserved for the exclusive use of monks and nuns? Many Christians -- no, a great number -- are of this opinion.

There can be no greater mistake. We have cited the passage in which Cardinal Manning exhorts to fidelity to the mortifications enjoined by the Church. To it he adds: "I would go further. Are there any in our days who have the courage to live as the saints lived? We read and admire their lives. We know how austerely and in what poverty they lived. We praise all that and shudder even to think of it. But what are we able to do? Where are our penances? Do we wear the livery of Christ? While seeking to be placed by the world among its votaries, we profess to be the disciples of Jesus Christ!"

In all Christian countries we find this search for comfort and pleasure -- we find Catholics who serve God and Mammon. In our 20th century, and especially since the War, the world, including Christ's disciples -- at least the greater part -- seems to live solely for enjoyment of some kind or other.

Pauline Reynolds, when making a retreat, in her humility wrote as follows: "It is no longer possible to dilate the vessel of my heart destined to overflow with the Divine life. The time is over. Yet, by fidelity to grace, I might have cultivated those dispositions that would have obtained for me a thousand-fold increase of life throughout eternity. But my will was as fault. *I set limits to trouble I would face*."

How many Christians, when dying, will have thus to reproach themselves! Yet, if only we put no limits to our generosity in serving God, instead of giving him a partial fidelity niggardly served out, how great could we add to the treasure of merits of the saints!

Cardinal Manning in his book *The Interior Mission of the Holy Ghost* explains how we can make Reparation. He says: "First, we must promptly follow the inspirations of the Divine Spirit. Secondly, we must proportion our fidelity to the measure of his gifts and graces. We must cease acting meanly and burying the talents confided to use; for a thousand talents we ought to give back ten thousand. Finally, we must serve God with great purity of heart, and by this I mean two

things: not only avoiding all that might sully the soul, but likewise *sacrificing* whatever tends to usurp the place of God in our souls."

Hence, it is evident, means of making Reparation are not wanting. What is, then? Souls prepared to utilize these means; souls ready to combat not only greater sins, but their lesser defects. There are wanting souls, who will devote themselves, not to extraordinary practices, but to the steady, resolute monotonous daily tasks and the generous accomplishment of daily trifles, all of which they offer in Reparation. We often aspire to impossible deeds of heroism, but "little things can reveal great love." It is not so difficult to do great things, they carry us away, but the ordinary duties, insignificant and irksome tasks, exact a measure of self-forgetfulness of which few are capable."

Mgr. de Ségur, with his sound common sense and characteristic subtlety, writes: "Our sanctification is an edifice built up of grains of sand and drops of water. For example, it consists of trifles at a glance repressed, a word held back, a smile checked, a line unfinished, a souvenir stifled, a welcome letter read only once and that rapidly, a natural reaction boldly restrained, a wearisome bore politely endured, an outburst of irritation suppressed at once, refraining from a useless purchase, overcoming fits of depression, tempering nature's transports with thoughts of God's Presence in us, overcoming repugnances: what is all this? Just insignificant trifles in the eyes of men who may not see them, but wonderfully clear to him who dwells within us. Here is what we have to watch closely. Here are both the smallest and the greatest proofs of fidelity that will draw down torrents of grace upon the soul."

What miserable creatures we are, seeing that such trifling acts of self-renunciation are the measure of our worth! Yet the fact is undisputed, and no one who has tried to make these acts will contradict Abbé Perrèyve's words, when, speaking from experience, he says: "When we are children, it seems so easy to be a hero or a martyr. But as we advance in life we understand the value of a simple act of virtue, and that God alone can give us the strength to accomplish it."

Let us be faithful laborers in performing hidden duties. Who know but that, during the War, the salvation of some solider, who fell in the trench or in an assault, was due to his poor suffering grandmother offering her prayers and aches for him. On the battlefield, who can say where the bullet shot by the humblest soldier finds mark?"

Do not, dear reader, object: "With what am I to make Reparation? How can I, who am so ordinary and insignificant, do this? With the

prophet, I can only say: *A, a, a, et nescio loqui* -- Ah, Ah, Ah, I know not how to speak. (Jeremiah 1:6) I can only sigh and groan and stammer out my inability. Saints? Yes, they can do something, but what can I do?"

Just as you are, you can do a work of justice, and atone for your infidelities by your fidelity to God. You can do even more, you can not only make up for your own spiritual poverty, bu you can offer him your merits, in compensation for the defects and sins of others.

We alone, considered in ourselves, can do absolutely nothing. Granted. But we, *plus* the grace of God, obtained by humility and fervent desires, have a strength and value far exceeding our conception.

With what did Jesus nourish 5,000 people in the desert? With five loaves and two fishes. What is the ratio here?

Possibly this saying of one whose whole life was an act of Reparation may carry home a deeper conviction: "It is not of gold, silver, or precious stones that our "hosts" are made, but of a little bread, which is a common substance and of no value." See the humility of her who thus took courage. Her words are true, and contain consolation for each one of us.

How Ordinary Souls Can Make Reparation

SIMONE Denniel, a member of the Congregation of Marie Réparatrice, just quoted, died very young after suffering for a long time from a painful disease, which doubtless God had sent in answer to her vehement desire to suffer. On November 4, 1910, she wrote: "This morning I made a longer thanksgiving after Communion, because I wanted to tell Jesus again and again that I would be his little victim. I thought that perhaps he was seeking for *victims* and that it would be a great work of zeal to instill into souls the desire to be *victims*. Therefore I will pray and suffer, so that God may increase their number, and raise up true, pure, generous and holy victims."

It is certain that there are souls who are not satisfied with a modicum of suffering. They have for so long contemplated Christ on the Cross, so deeply realized the miseries of mankind, that they cannot do otherwise than wish to be *victims* with Christ for their neighbor, and to give themselves to the utmost as a ransom.

In our ordinary language the word "victim" has something derogatory about it. We willingly say "sacrifice," but "victim" has not the same halo. Thus, when we speak of our soldiers' "sacrifices" during the War a glorious picture presents itself to our minds, but when we refer to the "victims" of the War the idea of suffering predominates. Yet these two words denote substantially the same notion: there is no sacrifice without a victim. But while "sacrifice" spells enthusiasm, self-surrender, voluntary immolation, "victim" rather suggests the endurance of a slave, bearing involuntarily some suffering which might more justly be styled an injustice or persecution.

It is regrettable that we have to use a word which leaves an unpleasant impression. We ought to employ it, knowing what exactly it means. When we speak of victim, in connection with Reparation, it does not mean suffering in spite of oneself, but giving oneself up joyfully. For some souls it is not sufficient to practice resignation, acceptance and submission. They seek the Cross; they long to find it, and having succeeded in their quest, with the Apostle St. Andrew they exclaim: *O bona Crux*. They kiss and embrace it. Notwithstanding the repulsion of their whole being, physical, mental and moral, urged by the love of Christ and of souls, they stretch out their limbs

upon the hard, rough beams of the Cross. They offer themselves to be nailed to it. They rejoice to suffer upon the shameful and yet glorious wood.

A fervent religious wrote thus: "Fortunately, when our Lord manifested his sufferings to me, I understood him to say: 'You will suffer all these.' I knew well that I could never endure his measure of sufferings, but I see that I must suffer in my measure to the full. If I cannot equal his sufferings, I can always fulfill my own." Then she adds: "My chalice is full, how I wish it were larger!"

What a glorious ambition it is to be a victim! It is a strange ideal, so utterly inexplicable, for those who have no conception of true grandeur. "To be a victim! What a folly!" they exclaim. No, what supreme wisdom! and how few are capable of understanding its sublimity, because to desire it presupposes so much grace, so many virtues. Yet more souls are capable of this heroism than we might think. All cannot preach, instruct, or write books, but who cannot learn to make the sacrifice of self and to suffer?

Thus to make the complete oblation of self is the most difficult of all vocations, because it calls for the maximum of self-surrender, yet it is not so inaccessible as it seems, for when we have attained the maximum, the rest matters little. Again, only those whom God especially singles out to devote themselves as "victims" can rise to this degree, but the specially chosen are perhaps more numerous than is supposed.

Let me here remind my readers of what has been said previously, as regards the obligation of consulting our director and weighing the obligations of our state of life, besides yielding to the attraction of grace. It is a very great undertaking to offer oneself as a victim: it needs more than a promise, made in a moment of consolation, more than a momentary fervent transport, to face a future that is so formidable. It does not cost us so much merely to *think* of suffering, it is quite another thing to *endure* it. When we kneel in fervent prayer, and pain is seen from afar, it stands out in golden letters; looked at nearer, we see they are really written in blood. This does not necessarily involve bodily martyrdom, but it does include a great many trials, which disconcert those who made their oblation with a too ingenuous presumption.

Bearing this in mind, Mgr. d'Hulst states the exact truth when, writing to a secular he says: "The doctrine of Reparation forms the base of *all true interior life*." Hence a truly spiritual life implies the desire to live as a victim, normally a wish, more or less accentuated,

to be a sacrifice (host). This is as true of the inner life outside the religious orders, as of that within them.

It is in religious orders -- more especially in those whose one object is Reparation -- that we generally find the call to be victim in its normal, though not its only, center. There may be fervent souls, living in the world, leading apparently a wholly secular life, who are also deeply committed to a life of reparation.

Mgr. d'Hulst's correspondent was one of these privileged Christians. In three letters of direction written by him between 1880 and 1885 he summarizes his views on Reparation. He says to her, in a letter dated November 19, 1880: "There is so much to atone for, even -- and above all -- in the sanctuary and the cloister. God awaits some compensation from those who have received very special graces and profited by them. How grievous are these scandals! Only the thought of Reparation can lessen their bitterness. In taking upon themselves expiation we resemble him of whom it is said: *Vere languores nostros ipse tulit*. "Truly he bore our infirmities." (Isaiah 53:4). If we were deeply penetrated by this thought, without binding ourselves to do great penances, should we not at least cheerfully accept the vexations and bitterness of life?"

He goes on to explain in detail how Reparation can be made: "We must make atonement by the tears of our heart, by fidelity, patience, deep piety, and love. We must make Reparation by our sufferings, by accepting cheerfully our impotence, spiritual darkness, anguish, weariness, and heaviness of soul. When overtaken by these, let us say: "It is well. I am ready to bear it; the measure is not overflowing. It is better so, better that I should serve as the wood of the holocaust. If I cannot be the priest who sacrifices, nor the victim, I can be the dead wood, burnt by another, destroyed for the glory of God."

Holocaust! This is the limit, there is nothing beyond. A holocaust implies a sacrifice, not a restricted offering, but a total donation, a complete sacrifice, in which the victim is wholly destroyed.

Of all the acts of religion, the holocaust is the most perfect sacrifice, the one that is most glorious for God and meritorious for man, because it is the most significant testimony that man can render to God's Sovereign Majesty, the most solemn protestation of his complete dependence upon the absolute power of God.

Père Ramière remarks: "Words are only too often mere sounds pronounced by the lips. God hears only those prayers which come from the heart, and though their language is more sincere than that of the lips, it is nevertheless liable to illusion. True sacrifice consists in the

creature giving up self to destruction in honor of God as Creator. Is not this the most perfect way of confessing that God is the principle of his life, the Supreme Arbiter of his destiny?

"Sacrifice is not only the witness of sentiments, words, or actions, it is the testimony of death." When sacrifice reaches the limit of the holocaust it can go no farther. Man can offer no more to his Creator. There is nothing beyond total self-immolation.

The great difficulty, however, is not so much giving oneself reservedly once for all and all at once, so to say, but after having made this wholesale sacrifice, not to retract in detail from the oblation thus made. The practice of making repines in the holocaust is traditional in the history of the human race, even as regards those who excel in virtue and strength of will. God allows our self-love to assert itself, so that we may always have numerous occasions of meriting. It would be, surely, too easy, too convenient, if it sufficed to make our sacrifice once for all. Over and over again we have to renew this oblation of ourselves and each time integrally. It is this total donation that constitutes our sacrifice and transforms it into a holocaust.

Practically this amounts to abandoning ourselves to God's good pleasure, in imitation of our Blessed Lord, who said: "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, that I may perfect his work." (St. John 4:34).

Bossuet in his discourse on *L'abandon à Dieu* has some beautiful thoughts on this subject, of which we will cite a few:

"Help me to make this act of abandon, my God, so simple and yet so comprehensive because it gives you all that I am, and unites me to all that you are."

"This act of self-abandonment includes my whole life, not merely that portion which I pass here upon earth as a captive exile, but likewise my life in eternity. I place my will in your hands, I give back to you my liberty of action, your gift. I have given all to thee, keeping back nothing. Man can do no more."

By this act of abandonment to the will of God, we do not remain inactive; on the contrary, we are all the more active, since we are more under the impulse of the Spirit and become more energetic in serving God.

Self-abandonment to God, as Bossuet explains it, is therefore something totally different from Quietism. We often quote him as an additional witness to the orthodoxy of our teaching.

This act of self-oblation further includes such acts as the subjoined.

Never doing agreeable things for the pleasure we find in them, but for God. When a choice of two actions presents itself, to choose the more unpleasant. Since Jesus can no longer suffer, to give him our sufferings, even as the sacramental elements give him their form and appearances. To let him substitute our sufferings (since he can no longer suffer) for his, so as to satisfy the ardent desire of his soul to offer sufferings for the glory of the Blessed Trinity and the salvation of souls. To endeavor to become "*Jesus*" under the appearances of "us." Within the limits of discretion and obedience to desire and seek mortification in the little details of life, as a preparation for greater sufferings, should it please God to impose them.

Such are the sublime aspirations of some privileged souls. Joyfully they endeavor to live up to this ideal, each according to her special spiritual attraction and distinctive form of piety.

A word in passing on the "Heroic Act" may fittingly find place here. Some devout Christians make the oblation of all their merits to be applied just as God thinks fit, or for the deliverance of souls from Purgatory. They offer all the indulgences they may gain, and all that may be gained for their intention after their decease, for the release of the holy souls.

Another generous act is to make a vow always to do that which is most perfect. Those who make this vow should have sound common sense, a well-balanced judgment, and the sanction of obedience. Otherwise it might be a fruitful source of scruples and eccentric actions. Here, more than anywhere, souls need "a mind that calculates and a heart that does not calculate." Both are necessary, but the latter is a *sine qua non*.

Others, again, go so far as to engage themselves by a solemn vow to live as victims of Reparation. In the Constitutions of the Benedictines of Perpetual Adoration, which have received the approbation of the Holy See, we read: "I vow and promise with all diligence to keep up the Perpetual Adoration and worship of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, as a victim immolated to Its glory." Hence, this solemn consecration as victim for the glory of God has the formal approbation of the Church. Pius X, by a decree dated Dec. 16, 1908, and a brief of July, 1909, accorded a monthly indulgence to those priests who, under given conditions, take a vow as priests to make Reparation.

But vows of this kind are as difficult to keep as the vow always to choose the most perfect line of action, which the Church speaks of as *arduum* and *arduissimum* in the office for the feasts of St. Andrew

Avellino and St. Jane de Chantal respectively. Whence it is clear neither is to be recommended, nor made without wisdom and discretion, prudence and authorization. These are absolutely necessary conditions.

We do not propose to explain this vow of Reparation in detail, we leave it to the skilled directors to whom it more particularly pertains and who can deal with it competently. Hence, we pass it over with a brief explanation of the foundation and subject-matter of this vow.

Those who desire to make this solemn promise must commence by defining what they intend it to include. These promises may embrace various degrees, but, speaking generally, they can be divided into two classes. The first comprehends all those sufferings which are brought about *by the ordinary Providence of God* -- sufferings which he has foreordained from eternity. Those who accept these willingly are really "victims" in the hands of God, and they offer him a very perfect oblation.

Secondly, those fervent souls -- not content with these ordinary sacrifices, and desiring to immolate themselves more completely -- who beseech God to send them additional sufferings, *as a supplement to the former.* These include sufferings of body, mind and soul, or even a premature death.

How far is this second and higher degree (1) possible, (2) praiseworthy? These questions must be discussed with extreme caution and great attention, for in such a delicate matter there is a real danger of illusions. As great generosity may lead to temerity, we must exercise all the more prudence and apply more rigorously the rules for "the discernment of spirits."

Of course it is not necessary to make either of these vows in order to lead a life of Reparation. They may crown such a life, but are not necessarily its foundation. They mark a maximum, something as it were over the line.

It is a great victory for God that there are souls in this world who desire sufferings with as much avidity as the greater number of men seek pleasures. It seems as though God rejoices in the fact of their existence, by fulfilling willingly their hearts' desires. For he himself has given them this thirst. When God wants to fill a heart he begins by emptying it. Whereas all around them have no room within for such yearnings, they are tormented with a thirst to satisfy them to infinity.

First of all, they cannot let our Lord suffer alone upon the Cross, they must alleviate his sufferings by sharing them. They long to wipe

his bloodstained brow, to expiate the blows of the hammer when the nails were driven into his sacred feet and hands, the purple furrows of the lash, by their voluntary and loving oblation. The back of Christ's Cross is empty; therefore they seek to be nailed, eager for one thing only, to be crucified in his exact likeness.

They take the advice of St. Catherine of Siena to the letter, which is as follows: "Let the tree of the Cross be planted in your heart and in your soul. Become like unto Jesus crucified. Hide yourself in his sacred wounds, bathe yourself in the Blood of Jesus crucified, permeate and clothe yourself with Jesus crucified, satiate yourself with opprobrium in suffering for the love of Jesus crucified.

A saintly soul, whose life will, we trust, soon be published, made this candid avowal to her director. She wrote: "We would like sometimes to sing the mercies of the Lord, be it ever so little, but this poor lyre vibrates too much, owing to the density of the materials of which it is made: I can scarcely make any use of it. I began to write to you a few days ago, but was obliged to stop. The first note gave out such a volume of sound, that a second would have snapped the cord.

"My body is too small for my soul, and my heart cannot contain my love for him… I can rarely speak as openly with you as I have done this evening, and I have only been able to do so by looking away from him."

It is related of a religious that, by a special grace of God, she was so overcome with sorrow at the thought of our Lord on the Cross, that she had made a resolution not to look at the crucifix. It chanced that, in order to go to the refectory, she had to pass by a large crucifix fastened to the wall. One day she raised her eyes to it, and contemplating the bleeding wounds, fell fainting to the ground.

Exaltation! sensationalism! you exclaim. Be it so. But, after all, which is most extraordinary? The one who cannot look at the Cross without suffering, or all who contemplate it without feeling any grief whatever. Unlike us, the saints cannot look upon the Divine immolation with indifference. Those strange beings, saints, suffer when they see our Lord suffer. Alphonsus Rodriguez, a saintly Jesuit lay brother, wrote: "It seems to me that were this suffering of compassion to be prolonged, no form of torment, however horrible, could be compared with it, for this depth of sorrow of soul resembles that of our Lord in Gethsemani, when he prayed saying: "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death." It was then that he sweated blood. This holy porter of the college of Majorca offered himself to endure all possible sufferings, even those of the lost, in order to obtain from God that men might

cease to offend him and that no soul might henceforth be lost.

In the *Acta Sanctorum* in the Life of St. Bridget of Sweden, whose feast is kept on October 8th, we read as follows: "When very young, she heard a sermon on the Passion. She was so impressed by it that she imprinted these sorrowful scenes upon the tablet of her heart. The following night she had a vision of our Lord upon the cross, and he said to her: "This is the treatment I have received." With her childish simplicity, she asked: "Lord, who has done that to you?" Jesus replied: "All those who despise Me and are insensible to my love." From that moment St. Bridget was so touched by the passion of our Savior, that she could not help thinking of it continually, always shedding bitter tears over Jesus' sufferings.

This exterior proof of sympathy with our Lord's sorrows is a special gift of God, one of his choicest. Nevertheless, this does not cancel what we said above -- namely, that the total abstention of all outward tokens of sympathy proves great indifference and inconceivable ingratitude on the part of men.

If only the crucifixion of Jesus did some good! He is there, the Divine Mediator, suspended between heaven and earth, so mangled, so suffering, and so stupendously ignored.

How can we furnish the tribute of glory which is due to God and refused him by man? By loving him?

Alas! a poor human word, and it represents a still poorer thing. With what can we love? With our wretched human heart? For the heart of man to love God seems a derision, mere irony. That which is the weakest, can it love that which is the greatest? Can we, so ungenerous, love him who has given himself without measure? His generosity is proved by the manger, the Cross, Holy Mass, the Sacraments, the Church. He gives all; how can we who limit and begrudge our gifts offer him anything? Can we whose love is feeble, so unworthy of the name, love him who is love itself? No, Lord, we cannot compete with you.

What a conflict! To enter the lists with one who wields the infinite, this thought inevitably rends and tortures the soul. We long to give, and have not the wherewithal. We would fain give much and our hands are empty. To him who is All, we must ever give so little.

Assuredly, it is not necessary to possess much in order to give much. He who gives all he possesses, however little it be, certainly gives much.

Yet, herein is another spiritual anguish: and continual torment, because one is conscious that one does not give wholly to God the

little one has. We know ourselves and cannot but admit our daily shortcomings. These may be trifles, but still how hateful it is to show the least lack of feeling in one's love of God. Hence, what should lessen her suffering only increases it. One longs to console the Master, by offering oneself wholly to him, but is conscious of numerous evasions, acts of meanness and self-love. St. Francis de Sales wittily tells us we shall not get rid of this feeling until a quarter of an hour after death. It is just this that overwhelms one. We have to serve God, who merits all; we have so little to give him, and this little is not fully given up.

God torments Saints with this constant anguish. Their desires continually grow stronger, and he only puts this consuming flame in their hearts, that he may contemplate their great magnanimity with pleasure, amidst all the pettiness that he hates.

Sister Teresa of the Infant Jesus, once said to our Lord: "I offer myself to you as a victim, a holocaust to your merciful love, that I may live in an act of perfect love. I pray to you, consume me unceasingly; let the torrents of infinite tenderness that overflow your soul pass into mine, so that I may be a martyr of love, o my God… O, my Beloved, with every beat of my heart, I renew this offering to you an infinite number of times, until dearth's shadows shall have passed away and face to face in eternity I can tell you my love."

In a meditation in which St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi received great spiritual illumination from God, she speaks thus of St. Aloysius Gonzaga: "Who can explain the priceless value of interior acts and the reward they merit! There is no comparison between what appears without and what takes place within. St. Aloysius, all his life long, thirsted after the interior aspirations which the Word breathed into his soul. He was an unknown martyr, for all who love you, my God, all who know how great and infinitely lovable you are, suffer a cruel martyrdom on seeing that they do not love you as they would wish, and that instead of loving you, so many continually offend you."

It would be some consolation to those who thirst for God, at last to find him and hold him in a loving embrace… But alas! as we follow after God, he hides himself. True, there is the Holy Eucharist, but the Real Presence does not last always; it is so mysterious: *Visus, tactus, gustus, in te fallitur.* There is sanctifying grace, but the continual Presence of God in the soul does not always ensure the presence of the soul in herself.

We are continually away from ourselves. Our frequent and trivial daily cares carry us far from this precious center where, by

sanctifying grace, "The Three" -- Father, Son and Holy Ghost -- always dwell. God is present *in* us: we are there not at all -- or so little.

Then there is prayer, but even so we must be content with faith, while we desire possession, with the reflection instead of the gift, with the image in the "glass" instead of the "face to face."

We want to be like unto Jesus, and yet how utterly far away he seems, how hidden, how hard to realize. Then we must add those terrible spiritual trials of aridity, when the Divine Master seems so far off and dim that we can scarcely recognize him and cry out with the Apostles on the lake: *Phantasma est!* -- "It is an apparition."

Yet Jesus knows we have left all to follow him. Marie de la Bouillerie, who became a religious of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart, speaking of her mother, said: "I will never leave her for a man." But the religious leaves her mother because she knows that Jesus was more than man. She says resolutely to him: "I will follow you. Where do you dwell?" He replies; "Will you follow me? come then." She sets out for the Promised Land, knowing that the road is long, and that it leads through the desert. What matters it? After a weary march, she thinks she has reached her Master's abode, the King's palace -- she knocks at the door like the child who once clambered up on to the altar, knocked at the door of the tabernacle and called out: "Lord, are you there?" and got no answer from within. So for her, too, the Tabernacle door remains closed. God does not reveal himself.

Deus absconditus -- "He is a hidden God." He crucifies and remains hidden, unspeakably mysterious and unapproachable! There we stay, knowing that he is within and could open, but prefers to wait. Thus was it with St. Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Easter morning. She sets out at dawn with her humble offering, a few spices -- it is all she can offer -- and she hurries on her mission of love. She reaches the garden and enters the tomb. The tomb is empty -- there is an angel, the grave clothes, some traces of him -- but not the Master! Yet "He" is the one she wants; not just the word of an angel, but a word from him, his own lips; not merely a relic of his showing that he was there just now; but *Him*, there in fact, now, plain to all of us. "Are you here, O Lord?" He is not far off. He is always close to those that seek him.

"Thou wouldst not seek me, had you not already found me." Pascal places these words on our Lord's lips, and they express a great truth. Those who seek in earnest and cry out: "Lord, where are you?" are no

longer on the way -- they have reached the end. While Mary Magdalene was asking for him, the Master was there, standing in front of her. It was he himself, though he showed himself as usual, in a disguise, as a gardener, and she did not recognize him: "Tell me where he is. Wherever he is, let me go to find him."

If the Lord manifested himself openly, he would satisfy the soul's desire, but not his own. He takes pleasure in the spiritual thirst of fervent souls. He is like a mother who hides, for her child to find her. "God desires nothing so much as to be desired," as St. Augustine says. That is why his wise action tortures us, but affords him such pleasure. *Deus absconditus*. God hides himself, and that is why his lovers suffer so much.

Religious have left all for God, that they may be united with him and yet, in spite of all their desires and efforts, they find they can never possess him and be wholly his. With the spouse in the Canticles, they exclaim: *Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus* -- "A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved." In the bitterness of their myrrh, God finds a sweet perfume of the greatest love.

Thus he could not long withstand Mary Magdalene's entreaties. Familiarly, as of old, he pronounces her name, "Mary!" Nor can he resist souls that seek him. At times he allows them to see him in a flash. They feel that they need only to throw themselves at his feet, and stretch out their hands to lay hold of him forever! Then he speaks: *Noli me tangere*. On hearing these words "Touch me not," their sorrow is at its sharpest. Is this to be the sole reward of their love? Has it counted for no more? "Lord, take away my heart's desire, or have mercy on me," they cry. But then especially he refuses to treat them otherwise. He wishes to deepen their inward yearnings, and hence he bids them wait with patience, and veils the reality of mercy under the form of ruthlessness. It is related that he once said to Pauline Reynolds: "My hour has not yet come. Be patient, in a short time you will see me." "Do you speak thus to a soul that loves?" she answered; to which our Lord replied: "Yes, I speak thus to one who loves because I love. Trust me implicitly."

Amidst the sufferings which spring from the soul's insatiable desire to give something, even much, to God, he provides her with means of showing herself more equal to her high ideals. That self-sacrifice spells suffering, the soul is convinced. She is unhappy precisely because her offering to God has cost too little.

Then, God sends great crosses, such as aridity, illness, false friends, persecutions, failures, and many other kinds of excruciating suffering.

Our Lord is never at a loss for crosses. His workshop is full of them. At Nazareth he apparently spent all his time making crosses of various sizes and kinds of wood.

This is how God acts: To slake a soul's thirst for sacrifice he sends suffering. He fills the full cup of suffering by making it overflow, and the fresh influx of bitterness results in the greatest happiness. Were we not accustomed to be so continually baffled by God's mysterious dealings with man, how amazed we should be at the strange paradox, by which our loving God imposes such great sufferings on those who are generous enough to offer themselves as holocausts.

St. Lydwine exclaimed in the midst of her pain: "Do not pity me, I am happy," and all who walk in her footsteps reecho her sentiments. Her biographer takes these words as his text in one of the finest passages ever written on suffering. This is the substance of his remarks: Victims suffer most of all, and yet are the happiest of all. To offer oneself for a holocaust is to offer oneself for happiness, for Jesus owes it to himself to repay in peace and joy that which has been sacrificed for him so generously. This is the experience of all eminent self-immolators. God compensates them so abundantly for their sacrifices that they exclaim: "Dear Lord, what a blundering bargain. I meant to suffer and expiate, and I have nothing but happiness." A soul says to Jesus: "Let me be nailed to your cross by you, O Lord." Jesus grants the petition. He drives in the nails; then seeing the blood flow and the victim break down, his heart breaks: he cannot go on. He stops, draws near, and fills the void wrought by suffering with joy, so that the soul begs to be spared joy as earnestly as others beg to be spared sorrow. Yet she goes on suffering, but her suffering is her happiness or rather, while still feeling her suffering, it is so full of divine gladness that she would not be relieved of the suffering for anything in the world. She must have it to provide fuel for the fire of sacrifice; and God trains the soul with alternate gladness and grief, each making the way for the other. Yet after all, suffering is swallowed up in joy; and the soul's unstifled sobs break forth like "hymns," as Bauthier finely says.

Abbé Perrèyve, a writer who excels in understanding and explaining the paradox of suffering and joy intermingling or balancing one with the other, writes: "How comes it, Lord, that no sooner have I set out on the way of the Cross than I hear such sweet consoling words?" No sooner has Jesus said: "If anyone will come after me, let him take up his cross," than he adds: "My yoke is sweet and my burden is light." The Abbé continues: "I have only just commenced my sacrifice when you give me consolation; no sooner have I taken up my

cross, than I feel your divine hand lessening its weight."

"O Jesus, you who order the sacrifices that are needed, and yet does ever diminish their pain by your tender love, you command us to renounce self, and when we practice detachment from creatures, you give us far more treasures than we have given up. You command us to take up our cross daily, if we would follow you, and then exchange it for a yoke that is sweet and a burden that is light. You are often so pleased with the least proof of our goodwill, and do reward our feeble efforts with unutterable consolations. Henceforth, I will not be afraid of you nor of your Gospel, nor will I tremble on hearing the word 'cross.' I know that the Cross contains the secret of all great consolations; and real succor in the pathway of life, where inevitably we must suffer. I draw near with confidence to the Cross; kneeling before it, I would find fresh grace of strength and patience by meditating on your Passion. Dear generous Master, do not refuse me this gift; receive me in the ranks of your faithful disciples, who, following you even to Calvary, find courage to endure their trials, and grace to exchange earth's bitter sorrows for boundless wealth."

Can we do better than close this chapter with such a beautiful, fervent, confiding and humble prayer?

Humility is the characteristic that finally sets its hallowing seal upon the true spirit of Reparation. All who resolve to devote themselves with Christ, to redeem the world by suffering, tremble as they do so, knowing their utter helplessness. They know that, left to themselves, the least touch of suffering would put them to flight. Those who offer themselves with the wine of the sacrifice know well that they are but drops of water. It is ever the most generous who realize most fully the utter insignificance of their gifts.

Conclusion

AT the present moment, many souls seem to be drawn towards Reparation and victimhood, but because they do not clearly understand in what it consists, they hesitate, fumble about, give up, or go off on the wrong scent. These few pages seek to awaken some souls, by sketching out the first principles.

Undoubtedly, in such a matter, a monograph or a living example is better than a booklet. This is why we have so frequently quoted from *lives*. However, a brief outline of the theory may be useful and serve as a landmark. Afterwards, the reading of deeper treatises, the advice of a skilled director, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, may complete the work of enlightenment, conviction and stimulation.

During the recent War, along the roads leading to the battle front, here and there, you came across notice-boards, on which were roughly scrawled names of places and arrows. They pointed the weary to some definite goal. These pages are simply meant to say: To SELF-SACRIFICE -- "Follow the Way of Reparation." They tell you the road to the goal from afar, not what you will find when you get there.

Just as only those who lived in the trenches during the War know what kind of life our soldiers lived, and all that happened there, and alone can speak of it with authority, whether or not they were listened to or believed, so only those who have been taught by God, either by personal experience or by contact with privileged souls, can adequately instruct others in the complete overthrow of self-love, in self-annihilation, and in the blood-dyed festivities of the total giving over of self to God.

The world will not understand the true Christian's love of the Cross. What matters it?

Having taken up their Cross, Christians must place it resolutely upon their shoulders. They will find narrow paths, subterranean passages, and obstacles that will make them stumble and fall. The path is rough, the road long. They will often be tempted to throw down their burden, to rid themselves of its weight and ease their aching limbs. Then the Master asks: "Will you leave me there? Is there no one who will, like Simon and Veronica, take charge of my cross and help me?" Will none come forward? Are our Master's words true?

One day, while Blessed Angela of Foligno was hearing Mass, our Lord gave her a great realization of the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross. She writes: "I heard him bless the unselfish who imitated his Passion and took pity on him. He said: 'May the hand of my Father bless you, who have shared and wept over my passion. You whom I have ransomed from hell by my terrible sufferings, have taken pity on me. May His blessing rest on the faithful who remembered my passion and kept the memory of it in their hearts, for they have offered to their Lord in his desolation the sacred hospitality of their love.

"I was naked upon the Cross, I hungered and thirsted, and you pitied me. I bless you for your work of mercy. In your last moments, I will welcome you, saying: Come, ye blessed of my Father, for I hungered and you dealt out to me the bread of your compassion. If, hanging upon the Cross, I prayed for my executioners, what shall I say of you who served me so faithfully, when I come in glory to judge the world? I cannot express the love I feel for all hearts full of pity."

More than ever, at the present time, Jesus asks for "devoted souls, ready to imitate his passion and to pity him."

May the divine Master lead at least a few of the readers of these pages to enroll themselves in the cohort of the "devoted," and grant them the generous desire to join the "pitiful in heart."

Who is willing?

"Here I am, Lord."